

One Night by jilly74

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Summary: Set immediately after the events of Season 2, Episode 9. Joyce and Hopper realize they've both been holding back feelings that they've held onto for far too long. Rated M for later chapters. (Dialogue borrowed at the first of the story directly from the episode.)

One Night

A/N & DISCLAIMER: *Just a little story set after the last episode of Season 2. Here's the usual disclaimer – none of the characters belong to me, I am but a fan who loves them and wants to see them happy, I am not earning any money from this, etc., etc., etc....Besides, if I actually had a Jim Hopper, do you think I'd be sitting in my bedroom writing fan fiction? HELL NO!*

"Have fun," he called out to his daughter as she exited the car. "I'll be back in a couple of hours to pick you up."

Jim Hopper watched as she entered the warmth of the Hawkins Middle School Gymnasium, then pulled away and started back towards the main road. A couple of hours should give him enough time to get started on some of the paperwork he had sitting at the station. From the way Flo had talked his ear off over the phone earlier, it would take him weeks (if not longer) to even put a sizeable dent into the stacks of folders quickly accumulating in his small office.

It was then that he saw her – standing outside of her car, arms folded and shaking a bit from the chill of the night air. He pulled his car over into one of the available spots and got out. He had been worried about her most of all after this whole situation – Joyce Byers had been through more in the last two years than should be humanly possible. Yet, there she stood, ready to brave another day.

"Hey," he said, walking towards her.

She meekly replied in turn. "Hey."

"I thought I might find you out here." He stopped shy of her car door.

"Well, Will wanted me to give him some space, so..." Joyce motioned back to the gym, then to her car. "...I'm giving him a few feet."

Hopper pulled his cigarettes from his coat pocket and shook them gently. "What do you say? I'm pretty sure Mr. Cooper retired in the

seventies, so...it might be okay." He pulled one out of the package and put it in his mouth, lighting it before taking a long drawl and passing it to Joyce.

She inhaled and then coughed, lowering her head. He could tell she was still distressed.

"How you holding up?"

Joyce bit her nail, "You know..."

"Yeah, that feeling never goes away," he replied as he took another pull off the shared cigarette. "It is true what they say, you know. Every day it does get a little easier."

She looked up at him quickly, unshed tears in her eyes as she took the cigarette from him. She didn't want him to see her cry, especially right now. She didn't know exactly HOW to feel. She was relieved that Will was alright. She was hopeful that their family life would settle down. She was sad that Bob wouldn't be around to be a part of that. She was thankful that Jim was here, though. She'd always been thankful for him. He always seemed to know exactly what to do to make people feel calm. Safe. Protected.

At that very instant he did exactly that. Wrapping his arm around her, he pulled her into a comforting hug. He held onto her for a minute, and she allowed a few of the tears to escape her eyes as she reached up to touch his hand.

"Thank you," she murmured into his side. "Thank you for always being there when I need you most."

Hopper pulled away gently, his arm still wrapped around her shoulder. "Why wouldn't I be? Joyce, I've known you for over half my life. I should be thanking you – I never would have graduated had you not let me cheat off your tests in Ms. Quigley's chem class."

Chuckling slightly, she gave him a quick nudge. "I almost didn't graduate because of you storing your smokes in my bookbag and letting me get caught with them."

"Yeah, Ratcliff was always looking for a reason to get me out of his

hair – I'm sure I was the reason he lost most of it." Hopper took the butt of the cigarette and dropped it to the ground, putting it out with the toe of his boot.

"Remember when you and Jimmy Loggins spiked the punch at the Senior Prom? He went ballistic once his wife got tipsy and threatened to suspend us all." Joyce looked up at him and smiled. "He was so mad..."

"Yeah but remember – there was a new little Ratcliff nine months later, so if you're asking me, we did the man a favor by getting him laid."

Joyce raised her eyebrow. "Oh my God, you're right!" She began to laugh aloud. "How did I not realize that earlier?"

Jim stood looking at her, the once somber look replaced with the first genuine smile he'd seen from her in a while.

"What are you gawking at, Hop?"

"You. You've always had the most radiant smile. I've always thought that. Lights up a room, or in this case, the parking lot." He knew he shouldn't have said it, but given the events of the past two years, he'd learned that saying it was better than not. He'd bit his tongue too many times before and look where it had gotten him. Alone, watching the girl of his high school fantasies marry one of the biggest jerks in the history of mankind. He couldn't stand to be in Hawkins after that, so he enrolled in the Police Academy and got away from there.

"Earth to Hopper? You still with me here?"

He snapped out of his thoughts. "Yeah, sorry. What did you say?"

Joyce nodded towards the gym, the faint music changing to an older tune. "Remember this one?"

He paused, listening closely. "Are they seriously playing this oldie at our kids' school dance?"

"The Beatles are classic," Joyce retorted. "And *Something* is one of

their best." She began to sway to the song, humming softly as she moved.

Hopper grabbed her arm and pulled her hand into his. "May I?"

"May you what?" she questioned, looking into his blue eyes.

"Have this dance? You know, I was promised one all those years ago, but someone left before I could cash in on it."

Joyce stared at him. "Here? In the parking lot? Hop, you can't be serious?"

The look on his face said it all. "Why not? Our kids aren't around to make fun of us, and I'm pretty sure we wouldn't be the first parents outside of a school gymnasium to dance to a Beatles song to make up for eighteen years of waiting, right?"

She laughed again. "Well, when you put it that way – maybe we are, but why the hell not?"

Bowing his head, he pulled her to him gently, his one hand resting gently on her hip as he pulled her other hand into his and started to sway softly. She closed her eyes and allowed herself to get lost in the moment. All the cares and worries of the real world left her body for a short time as they moved in time with the music. She wasn't quite sure how, or even when it happened, but when she opened her eyes, she had melted into his arms, her head resting on his chest.

"Hop?"

Her voice sounded so fragile. He was worried he'd gone too far, but he needed her to know that he was here for her no matter what. "Yes?"

He dared look down at her. She was still looking off in the distance.

"You want to come over later?" She stood silent for a moment, before pulling away from him, his body instantly missing her warmth. "I don't want to be alone tonight."

A/N: OK, is this worth continuing/posting on here? Be honest with me.

I appreciate reviews, but I don't hold anything hostage – I write to get things out of my head, and if someone else gets some entertainment out of it, then so be it.